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AUTHOR	Welden, Terry A.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Criticism and evaluation of classroom speeches in communication courses should be centered more on student oriented methods rather than on instructor evaluation alone. One approach is based on the use of seven-point differential scales, whereby students can provide immediate reactions to performances by their classmates. This method is of value to students both as speakers and as critics; it also assesses the behavioral outcomes of utilizing the principles taught in basic communication courses. A second procedure applies specifically to the informative speech, whereby each speaker obtains, in short written form, statements from his audience that tell him if the audience recognized and retained the important points of information from his presentation. Finally, in evaluating persuasive speeches, student-critics can be asked to list their personal reactions to each proposition in the speeches, as well as their predictions of both the average audience response and the response distribution (scattered or clustered). This third approach is basically an exercise in audience analysis. (RN)

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three approaches to speech criticism and evaluation

by Terry A. Welden, Sarah E. Sanderson and Lauren E. Ekroth

Responding to the question at the University of Hawaii of "How do we move away from a teacher dominated classroom especially in the area of speech criticism and evaluation?," the three approaches described here were considered as ones with which a teacher might like to begin in finding those methods most suitable for the situation in which he finds himself.

I.

Application of Speech Ratings

Any speech situation, no matter how narrowly specified, is a complex situation. Any effort directed toward improving the speech behavior of the speaker by a critic, no matter how skillful, is as difficult as the situation is complex. Fortunately, our tradition has a healthy array of functional speech rating forms available to speaker and critic alike. To introduce another alternative form demands an appeal which is broader than, "Here is one you might try if you are unhappy with your current choice." The approach to speech ratings considered here encompasses two distinct appeals, and while it is not original in its fundamental reliance on semantic differential scales, it has evolved over a number of years through test and application in the speech classroom.

Briefly, the approach assumes a utility for word-phrase bound seven-point scales that can be clustered under selected concepts. Such a rating form might place under the concept "content" the scale:

Made Credible by Speaker —:—:—:—:—:—:— Credibility Assumed by Speaker

Our concern centers not on the research potential of the scaling methodology, but rather on developing useful, descriptive scales which accommodate acknowledged speech concepts, and even on the evolving of important concepts from the growth of related scales. When we realize the number of rounds of speeches a teacher hears each year, and the ease of use and availability of duplicating machines, each teacher with the use of a small card file and a number of ditto masters can quickly determine for his own needs those concept-scale combinations that are appropriate for him. Students quickly feedback their reaction to scales that are "fuzzy" or "ambiguous" and to scales that clearly spell out the limits of the teacher's immediate interest. The teacher, too, quickly learns, by trying out constructed scales, that some are useful and some need discarding.

The first appeal of this approach to speech rating is that of utility to speaker and critic alike. Current rating forms can be placed on a continuum bounded by the concept "extremely useful to the speaker" and the concept "extremely useful to the critic." They are useful if and when they clearly specify problems and suggest guidelines for improvement. From the critic's point of view, they are useful if and when they offer a broad array of alternatives to which attention can be called by a simple check mark as well as a number of catergories that coincide with the critic's image of the significant speech variables. The present approach to rating was developed to integrate the two extremes of that continuum — "extremely useful to the speaker" — "extremely useful to the critic." Improvement, stagnation, or regression can be clearly noted by the critic across a series of speech assignments for each speaker. A simple check mark in one slot of each scale employed can be made quickly by the critic, and these marks are quite independent of any marks given a speaker on a previous assignment as far as the memory of the critic is concerned. No teacher with, say, three sections of twenty students each is going to remember the last rating he gave a particular speaker on a particular scale.

The concepts selected for the rating sheet and the scales chosen under each concept reflect the critic's desired emphasis in any given round of speeches. From the student's point of view, the present technique provides a limited, defined index of success-failure and a quick reference to past and future efforts. It does not select a concept such as "reasoning" and merely indicate with a check mark "needs improvement," but rather, indicates the instructor's response along a specific continuum. For instance, it might be helpful to use "clear analogy — obscure analogy." Should a student employ what the teacher-critic views as analogical reasoning, the check mark indicates a more specific reaction than either "needs improvement" or "satisfactory."

The second appeal of this mode of criticism and evaluation is that it provides some behavioral indicies

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of success-failure. The rating form considered here contains scales to characterize the behavioral outcome of practicing or ignoring certain principles espoused in many basic speech courses. The following examples may be helpful in the construction of appropriate scales for your course if you can state your terminal objectives behaviorally. Under the concept structure, for example, "strong audience adaption—weak audience adaption" characterizes the result of the effort expended by the speaker on his introduction, transitions, and conclusion as they relate to his present, real audience. A favorable check mark is not a gold star for producing something that can be recognized as an "introduction," "transition," or "conclusion." It *is* a description of the "goodness" of these elements in terms of how they "fit" with *this* audience. Under the concept effects, "feedback utilized-feedback not utilized" characterizes the extent to which the speaker modifies his overt speech behavior as a response to the audience's behavior. The scale could be replaced or supplemented with "feedback elicited-feedback not elicited," and the descriptive power of the appropriate check mark would remain significant. Similarly, the scale term "made credible by speaker" does not index the mere inclusion of documentation and authority but, rather, indicates the degree to which this inclusion produces in the critic the response, "He (the speaker) is producing a believeable body of content." Many scales were developed with this consideration in mind, and you might well find it enjoyable and profitable to construct more effective scales to cluster under these or more functional concepts.

II.

Assessment of Speeches to Inform

The assignment is often made, "Prepare and deliver a speech to inform." A problem of assessment immediately arises for speaker and listener alike. Typically, the classroom speaker who has been assigned a "speech to inform" has one or more of three objectives in mind—first, that the audience will remember that he did speak and what the subject of his speech was; second, that the audience will be able to recognize certain items of information included in his speech; third, that the audience will be able to remember the important points of his speech without prompting. But in a classroom with twenty to thirty students, how can the assessment of the chosen objective (s) be accomplished easily, quickly, and with a minimum of fuss? In a busy classroom the system for evaluation and feedback must be built into the learning situation and be accepted as a matter of course instead of becoming a special experiment.

Working toward this end with certain assumptions in mind, the "Kommunication Kwiz" was designed. The assumptions were that five to seven items from a short informative speech were as much as a student could hope for his audience to recognize or recall; that the construction of the test items should be left to the student speaker, thus guiding him to inform with well-defined terminal objectives in mind; and, finally, that in taking the test the audience members would learn to recognize their responsibilities in the communicative situation for listening to gain information.

The class procedure is as follows. Included in the assignment of "a speech to inform" is the responsibility of evaluation. Each speaker is required to construct a six-item test covering what he wants the class to recall or recognize from the information presented in his speech. The form of the test is left to the student. The audience members are required to supply themselves with three-by-five cards. On the assigned day, the names of the speakers are written on the board in the order they will speak. The audience members write their names in the upper left hand corner and the names of the speakers in the lower right hand corner of their three-by-five cards. At the conclusion of each speech the speakers administer their evaluation quiz, either orally or written; the audience members record their answers on the appropriate card; and the speaker collects the answers. These would be graded outside of class. The scores also would be recorded by the speaker on a master speaker form, and the cards, scored and marked with the number correct as well as a notation of the class average, would be returned to the students to be recorded on their individual master listener forms.

The difference between the two forms, of course, centers on which scores are recorded. The speaker records a score for each listener to *his* speech. The listener records *his own* score on each of the tests given by the various speakers. The forms (master speaker and master listener) can be standardized or left to the discretion of the individual students. After every one has spoken, the listeners and speakers total their individual scores. The entire process for all speakers consumes no more than five minutes of each class period. By looking down their individual master sheets the students as listeners can determine how well they have remembered or recalled the information a speaker wanted them to remember, in comparison with the rest of the class by checking their listening score" for his speech against the class average score. The students as speakers can tell how well they have managed to communicate the information they wanted.

By retaining these sheets throughout the informative speech assignments, the student speaker can tell

how well he is achieving his objectives with individual students, with the class, and in relation to the speeches delivered by his peers.

It is desirable, should time allow, to carry this procedure one or two steps further for at least one round of speeches. What has been emphasized is a post-test immediately following each speech. The Kommunication Kwiz is a check on immediate recall. If the teacher wants to illustrate the objective of long range recall, he can have all or selected students administer their original quizzes a week or two later and compare the scores. With this modification the listener would also be gaining insight into the process of retention of items the speaker indicated as important in the first evaluation. A possible second step would be one which would precede the speech. In order to test the prior knowledge of the topic on the part of the class members (as measured by the student constructed six item test), selected student speakers might administer a pre-test the day before they speak. If all of these procedures are followed—pre-test, post-test, and a delayed post-test—the student will have a fairly complete picture of the process of achieving informational objectives. He will also have some idea of the distinctions between recognition, recall, and retention of information.

This mode of evaluation is not to be used in lieu of the oral and written criticism but as an extension of it. The more extensions of criticism and evaluation the instructor can add which give the student speaker a view of the speaking situation as containing many audience members instead of one (the instructor giving the grade) the more "real" the speaking situation becomes. As a speaker, the student is encouraged by the reality of the audience to evaluate his objectives, his method-design within the speech for attaining them, and his evaluation tools and techniques. He learns to obtain and utilize feedback in refining his speeches. As a listener, the student is led to evaluate his responsibilities in the communication process and to attempt to understand methods for improving his abilities to recognize and recall useful information.

III.

Assessment of Speeches to Persuade

Problems in assessing the effectiveness of student speeches proliferate, and the validity of any mode of assessment seems always open to attack. However, apart from the difficult matter of how valid (or how arbitrary) any instrument is, there exists some practical problems with which to contend, such as finding instruments that take only limited time from crowded class schedules and also are not mere "busy work" unrelated to learning what should be learned.

And what, indeed, "should be learned" in a basic speech course?

As part of the "communication revolution" in the instruction of speech has come the shift from a speaker-centered or speech-centered focus of instruction to an audience-centered approach. Whereas "skills" are still a necessary and important part of basic speech instruction for many good reasons, the emphasis in instruction is shifting away from *knowing how* to make a "good speech" as defined in its own terms to *knowing that* interpersonal communication is a complicated affair which requires that a student communicator have a good understanding of the elements of the speech situation if he is to be maximally effective.

The instrument detailed here is actually a very simple and, admittedly, rough measure. It is a simple 9-point scale to which students are asked to respond from "totally agree" to "totally disagree" with the message of a speaker. However, it does meet some necessary criteria. First, it takes only about a minute to complete; second, students find it easy to do and do not seem to think it noxious nor a waste of time; third, and most important, it puts focus on "what should be learned"—that the receivers in a speech-communication event are complicated, changeable, and by their very presence affected by the event.

At least a week before beginning an assignment in persuasive speaking, students are asked to submit their proposition stated as clearly and unambiguously as possible. A student submitting a vague or ambiguous proposition is asked to rewrite it, and he is thereby induced to decide as exactly as possible just what belief he wants his audience to share or what behavior he wants them to perform.

These propositions (one from each student) are listed on a numbered sheet, and then the students are asked to make three judgments about each proposition. (1) They are asked to indicate their *personal responses* to each. (2) They are asked to predict the *average response* of the audience of which they are a part. (3) They are asked to predict the *distribution* of the audience in terms of one of three kinds of profiles: flat distribution (responses scattered across most of the range with little clustering); bi-modal distribution (clustering of individuals in two areas

of the 9-point scale); and central tendency (clustering of most respondents around one area on the scale). Typical profiles are exemplified for the students at the blackboard.

At the top of the rating sheet would appear the code:

B = Bi-Modal; F = Flat CT = Central Tendency

1 = Totally agree 5 = neither agree nor disagree

2 = Strongly agree 6 = mildly disagree

3 = Agree 7 = disagree

4 = Mildly agree 8 = strongly disagree

9 = totally disagree

The rest of the rating sheet as completed would look like this:

Proposition	My Response	Predicted Class Response	Predicted Distribution
1	7	4	CT
2	2	5	F

etc.

Thus, the first use of this instrument is really an exercise in audience analysis for the students. Typically the whole exercise takes about twenty minutes to do (responding to about twenty propositions) after a few minutes of explanation. After the exercise is completed, one or two students can compute the average class response and draw the appropriate profile in about an hour, and at the next class meeting the instructor can have the students compare their predictions with the actual responses of the group.

At this point, the student has some notion of where his audience stands on all the propositions, and after writing his own audience analysis from this information, each student is asked to predict the shift he expects his audience to make after he presents his speech. He is asked to support his predictions with some "educated guesses" about the variables in his audience which might help or hinder his attempt to change their beliefs or behaviors.

Immediately following each presentation, and before comments are made by instructor or students, all members of the audience are asked to indicate their response to the proposition on a small slip of paper and also to write a sentence or two indicating why they responded as they did. An example might be:

8 "A Civilian Review Board should be established in Honolulu to judge complaints against the police."

Reasons:

"Insufficient evidence" or "speaker himself didn't seem convinced" or "My father is a policeman and says review boards are worthless."

The slips are given to each speaker, who then (outside of class) computes the average response and draws a profile of the audience. Then he attempts to account for the changes resulting from his presentation.

Finally, one or two weeks after the presentations, a few minutes are taken from the beginning of a class to have the students respond to the propositions covered during those presentations. These slips are given to each student and he is asked to compute the average response to his proposition and to draw a final profile. The purpose of asking for the delayed response is to sensitize the students to "sleeper effects" and extinction effects that take place over time. For example, during a reported outbreak of rabies in Hawaii one student speaker received strong positive response to a speech with the proposition that "All dogs and cats in Hawaii should be *required* to have rabies shots." A week later, after the rabies scare had been thoroughly discounted in the press, the same proposition received neutral and even negative responses. The reasons for the change were obvious enough in this case. But through this technique of asking for a delayed response students come to learn that persuasion cannot be regarded as a "one-shot" effort that yields lasting effects.

Other modes of evaluation, such as oral critiques of speeches, may continue as usual. The initial class exercise and the subsequent comparison of actual responses with predicted responses do take some class time, but students tend to find it exciting and an interesting way to approach audience analysit as communication strategists, and as performing speakers.

Each of these three approaches to the understanding of Speech-communication behavior have emerged through classroom experiences that seemed to demand the inclusion of student oriented evaluation and criticism. The behavioral bases of these techniques have been subjected to practical tests and have proven to be useful, interesting and realistic approaches for our classrooms. Modification and extended application should prove worthwhile and, perhaps, such effort will lead to new and exciting innovations in other speech programs.

PROFILE OF TERRY A. WELDEN

Terry A. Welden is Assistant Professor of Speech-Communication at the University of Hawaii. He received his B.A. from West Virginia University, his M.A. from the University of Pittsburgh, and his Ph.D. from Michigan State University. He is a member of SAA, Pacific Speech Association, and the National Society for the Study of Communication. Professor Welden has had the responsibility for communication innovation in the basic speech course at both Kansas State University and the University of Hawaii. He has contributed numerous articles to state, regional, and national publications and is editor, with Huber W. Ellingsworth, of *Speech-Communication: Theory in Practice*, a reading-activity text in basic communication training.

PROFILE OF LAUREN E. EKROTH

Lauren E. Ekroth is Assistant Professor of Speech Communication at the University of Hawaii. He received his B.S., M.A., and Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota. He is a member of SAA and the Pacific Speech Association. Professor Ekroth's major area of interest is intercultural communication. He has taught in the Maryland overseas program in Europe and served on the field research staff for a University of Minnesota project in Bogota, Colombia.

PROFILE OF SARAH E. SANDERSON

Sarah E. Sanderson is Assistant Professor of Speech-Communication at the University of Hawaii. She received her B.A. from Fairmont State College, West Virginia; her M.A. from Bowling Green University, Ohio; and her Ph. D. from the University of Southern California. She is a member of SAA, Pacific Speech Association, Western Speech Association, and the International Society for the Study of General Semantics. Professor Sanderson, whose major interest in media utilization, is in Thailand on a year's leave of absence from the University of Hawaii.